



Dogri Epic *Jitto*: Through the Lens of Indian and Western Poetics

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Received:30 Dec 2025; Received in revised form: 27 Jan 2026; Accepted: 01 Feb 2026; Available online: 05 Feb 2026

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Abstract— *The paper explores the dynamic growth of the epic genre as an oral and written tradition. It surpasses different eras, cultures, geographies to replicate the transcending cultures, eras, and geographies to replicate the worldwide condition of the humans and the values of the society. By juxtaposing the Western and Eastern epic traditions- with reference to the classical figures like Homer, Milton, Valmiki and Vyasa- it places the Dogri epic Jitto by Padma shri awardee Jitendra Udampuri in the larger context of the Indian and Western poetics. The Dogra cultural philosophy has been deeply articulated in Jitto, which is grounded in the legend of Bawa Jitto, an agrarian folk hero who forfeited himself in the resistance of feudal oppression. Based upon the Longinus's theory of the sublime, Aristotle's principles of epic structure and tragedy, Longinus's notion of the sublime and Bharata's rasa theory in Natyasastra, the paper examines how the mahakavya synthesizes sublimity, heroism and emotional depth. Heroic (vira) rasa which has been chiefly highlighted in the paper aligns with the main themes of sacrifice and resistance as portrayed in Jitto. The study highlights how Jitto not only disseminates a local legend but also reiterates the epic's everlasting appeal as a genre which is capable of socio-cultural renaissance, historical mindfulness and aesthetic wholeness.*



Keywords— *Epic tradition, Folk literature, Indian Poetics, Jitto, Western Poetics.*

Epic as an oral and written form transcends across ages, generations, cultures and nations, thereby, encompassing a grand philosophy of life. As a creation of the age and essence of its people, epic has moved across space and time to highlight cultural norms and values of any given society during a specific period and beyond. Admittedly, epic poetry with its intense universal relevance has "constantly responded to the profound needs of the society in which it was made" (Abercrombie, 71). The world epic tradition establishes timelessness of epic and exhibits universal human spirit in a diverse socio-cultural background. The connection between history and reality drawn by Andrew Lang when he states that "The epics are not only poetry but history, history not of real events, indeed, but of real manners, of a real world, to us otherwise

unknown." (7) echoes interplay of heroic past to comprehend the evolution of culture and tradition in any society.

As a genre, epic in the West is inextricably linked with Homer and ancient Greek civilization whereas in the East, particularly in India, the genre dates back to 5th Century BCE specifically to Valmiki's *Ramayana*. The western epic tradition ranges from Homer to Milton, and between them the poems of Virgil, Ovid, Lucan, Orlando Furioso, Camoes and Tasso continue the tradition. Likewise, the Indian epic tradition originates with Valmiki, the sage-poet of the *Ramayana* and has been carried forward by Vyasa, Kalidasa, Bharavi, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, Sriharsha and others. What is noteworthy is the intersectional dimension of both the western and the

eastern tradition which ostensibly exhibit summation of the values of life by reinforcing nobility and dignity of human effort which has cosmic significance resonated aptly in the words of Eliot, “Every nation, every race has not only its own creative, but its own critical turn of mind” (47).

Irrespective of the fact that the diversity of world cultures has catapulted the expansion of literary canon in various dimensions, epic continues to exist and grow. A cursory glance at the origin of the genre in the West and East through this juxtaposition necessitates further exploration of the genre in the Indian context with special reference to epics written in Indian languages within the intersectional paradigms of Indian poetics and western literary criticism. Taking this as the point of departure, this paper examines the Dogri epic *Jitto* written by Jitendra Udhamपुरi, Padma Shree awardee dogri writer within the theoretical framework of Indian and Western Poetics so as to highlight the overlappings, divergences and “mutually complementary” differences between the two.

To achieve this end, the paper begins by providing a brief overview of the legend of Bawa Jitto which existed as an oral lore, a ballad known as *Karak of Bawa Jitto* which was initially published by Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages. The ballad running into 374 lines is a literary masterpiece and continues to exist in many forms and genres and has been explored, adapted and improvised by writers, scholars and theatre directors. The story of Bawa Jitto goes back to five hundred years when a common man, Jitmal sacrificed his life while fighting against the oppressive practice and unjust demand of a feudal lord. Jitmal's sacrifice immortalized him with the name Bawa Jitto who is as an archetypal Dogra folk hero. An epitome of dogra identity, Jitto still continues to rule the hearts of lakhs of people thronging every year at his Samadhi at Jhiri in Jammu.

The legend has it that Jitmal was a farmer, who lived in a village named Aghaar in the foothills of Trikuta hills, the abode of Goddess Vaishno Devi. An ardent devotee of Goddess and an assiduous farmer, he lived with his adolescent daughter, Kauri since he had lost his wife during child-birth. A doting father, Jitmal had dedicated his life to his daughter's upbringing and lead a spartan life. Jitmal's prosperity, nevertheless, was coveted by his aunt and cousins, who hatched various conspiracies to eliminate him. As a result, Jitmal became a victim of agnatic rivalry in land feuds and left his birth place in resentment when he realized that the judgment of village panchayat was unfair. Jitmal left his home and hearth and came to the plains of Jammu along with his daughter, to seek help of his friend Rullo, who gave him shelter and helped him to approach Mehta Bir, the feudal lord. On Jitmal's insistence to be lent

a piece of land for farming, the landlord granted him a barren unproductive land overgrown with wild growth and also obligated him to pay one fourth of harvest as feudal rent, which was a practice during feudal times.

Jitmal's toil yielded incredible results and the landlord's exploitive tendency took another evil turn when he demanded half the share of the yield. To this, the courageous and upright Jitto disagreed and when the landlord's men came forward to forcibly capture the yield, Jitto demonstrated exemplary courage to end his life over the heap of wheat rather than bowing to the greedy and atrocious wickedness of the feudal lord. He has ever since been venerated as Bawa Jitto and is revered for standing up against the injustice and unfair treatment meted out to peasantry during the feudal times.

The five conditions that Longinus (1965) gives in his essay 'On the Sublime' equates sublimity with elevation of the soul so as to evoke great thoughts in the minds of the audience. These five sources of sublime are from the innate inner qualities of a poet. The five main sources of sublimity --- grandeur of thoughts, a vigorous and spirited treatment of the passion, a certain artifice in the employment of figures, dignified expression, majesty and elevation of structure find a strong and convincing illustration in Jitendra Udhamपुरi's mahākāvya *Jitto*. The poet's grandeur of thought is his making the reader delve into rich ethos of *duggar*, which echo Jitmal's persona and actions, thereby, evoking lofty thoughts and stirring emotions. Since noble diction creates dignified expressions, mahākāvya *Jitto* is richly infused with the profound choice of words, metaphors and ornaments of diction, reflected in the very opening of the epic when the poet eulogizes the land of dogras by elevating it to a divine cosmos, where existence of Almighty is omnipresent:

देवी, देवता आंगर लन्दे,

जिस्दे मिट्टी, कंकर, पथर I

डुगार दी ए धरत पवितर,

सुरगे साई तीर्थ घर घर II (*Jitto* 23)

Sacred is soil and stone where

Deity and God are born here

This land of Duggar is angelically pure

Temple of worship is every home where (My trans.)

The western concept of sublimity occupies prominence in the exhilaration of spiritual realization in the epic *Jitto* which resonates with what *rasa* does in Indian poetics. *Rasa* as reader's immersive emotion response to the text exhibits dominant emotion of a literary text. has a cosmic vision. *Rasa* theory, which forms the core of the

whole body of Indian Literary Aesthetics deals with evocation of rasas in a literary work. The concept of rasa was systematically elucidated in one of the seminal texts in Indian Literary Aesthetics, the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, attributed to the sage Bharata Muni. Composed around the 2nd century BCE to the 2nd century CE, the *Nāṭyaśāstra* is a comprehensive treatise on performing arts, encompassing drama, dance, music, and aesthetics. It delineates the principles of *rasa* (aesthetic relish), *bhava* (emotional states), and *abhinaya* (expression) that form the core of Indian aesthetic experience. Understandably, as an age-old concept in the Indian literary universe, the *rasa* as an aesthetic principle has evolved over time with its first mention in *Rigveda* connoting water whereas in *Atharvaveda*, it was elucidated as “juice or sap of grains”. Thereafter, Bharatmuni constructed *Rasa* as the ‘aesthetic pleasure’ which is the aesthetic emotion that a reader or spectator experiences while dealing with a work of art” (Chandran and V.S. 33). Bharata, in the chapter six of *Nāṭyaśāstra* proclaims:

विभावानुभावव्यभिचारिसंयोगाद्रसनिष्पत्तिः । (Bharata, VI.31)

This translates to: The combination of *vibhāvas*, *anubhāvas* and *vyabhicāribhāvas* gives rise to *rasa*.

A *sthāyibhāva* along with *vibhāva*, *anubhāva*, and *vyabhicāribhāva* which are present in a work of art, produces *rasa*. *Vibhāvas* are the stimulants. They perform the task of stimulating a particular emotion in a reader or spectator. The notions of *vibhāva*, *anubhāva*, and *vyabhicāribhāva* have been discussed by Bharata in context of the actor in a dramatic presentation or a work. He enumerates eight *sthāyibhāvas* namely: desire (*rati*), amusement (*hāsa*), grief (*śoka*), anger (*krodha*), determination (*utsāha*), fear (*bhaya*), revulsion (*jugupsā*), and amazement (*vismaya*). He enumerates eight corresponding aesthetic emotions or rasas that come out of the eight *sthāyibhāvas* which are- the erotic (*śṛṅgāra*), comic (*hāsyā*), tragic (*karuṇa*), violent (*raudra*), heroic (*vīra*), fearful (*bhayānaka*), macabre (*bībhatsā*), and wonder (*adbhuta*).

Admittedly, the predominant *rasa* in *Jitto* is heroic (*vīra*), since the epic is rooted in inner enthusiasm (*utsāha*) of the folk hero ignited by his courageous triggers (*vibhāvas*) and presented through his bold action (*anubhāvas*) ostensibly guided by divine authority. Jitmal epitomizes the valiant spirit in Indian aesthetics by his firm determination, valor and insubordination to injustice which are profoundly intertwined with the *vīra rasa*. Jitmal's courage to fulfill the discriminating demands of the feudal lords is an assertion of his self-esteem and dignity that replicates the unwavering spirit of the whole agrarian community. that reflects the spirit of the entire agrarian community. His firm dedication to Goddess Vaishno Devi

also highlights the spiritual aspect of Jitma's character which turned his material fight into a spiritual one. An emotive upsurge is fashioned by the disparity between inner belief and apparent struggle which allows the reader to witness the *vīra rasa* as an intense emotional orientation with justice and courage. Thus, the sacrifice of Jitmal transcends the temporal misery and is steady with the Indian epic tradition which personifies hero as an instrument to maintain the universal balance and moral code of conduct.

Aristotle's statement that epic poetry has a great, a special capacity for enlarging its dimensions, is seen concretized in *Jitto*, where Jitendra Udhamपुरi has effectively comprehended almost all the aspects of life. The writer aims at cosmic majesty of God pervading and transcending our life in beginning when he highlights ubiquitous omnipresence of Goddess in *duggar*:

डुगार देश दा मुकुट त्रिकुटा

जिथे वैष्णो माता बसदी I

ममता दा आपार ओ सागर,

हर मुराद जो पूरी करदी II (Jitto 23)

Trikuta is duggar's crown

Where abides the Goddess our own

Manifestation of maternal love

Fulfills every wish of the one who bows (My trans.)

Jitendra Udhamपुरi follows a sublime heroic ideal of a sound, peaceful and harmonious social order. Spread into 9 Chapters and 1296 slokas, *Jitto*, the hero of the epic is an archetypal dogra farmer who epitomises righteousness, diligence and discipline. The epic portrays Jitto as:

नित- नेमी हा, धर्मी - कर्मी

जप – तप, संध्या – पूजा करदा I

रानहदा – बाहनदा, को कसानी,

कार – बाहार हा इयान्ह चल्दा II (Jitto 24)

Diligent, disciplined and devout

Jitto is a farmer beyond doubt

Ploughing, tilling by the sweat of brow

Draws his sustenance and to the Goddess he bows. (My trans.)

Aristotle's unity of plot and its alliance with tragedy suggests Homer is a paradigm of epic poetry who presents a connected story in the *Iliad* without superfluous narration of the Trojan War. Likewise, dogri mahākāvya *Jitto* focuses on one particular story – the story of a peasant to sustain an organic whole. Based on a legendary figure, the story is set in princely state of Jammu and Kashmir in

fifteenth century when feudal landlordism was oppressive and unjust to the land tillers. The *mimesis* of *Jitto* in verse told in a narrative form draws attention to the life of Jitmal who undergoes numerous hardships despite being an upright and assiduous farmer. The narrative engages us in Jitmal's migration from his native place to an unknown terrain, where he exhibits the power of his hard work by producing plentiful crop produce in a barren land granted by the landlord.

Another significant similarity between epic poetry and tragedy, according to Aristotle is that epic poetry must share many of the elements of tragedy. The six parts of tragedy pervade *Jitto*, wherein the spectacle of Jitmal's native village, Aghaar evokes in the reader a visual image of virgin landscape, swaying pine trees and rippling rivulets and springs. This visual experience is enhanced with diction in canto 5 when Jitmal's daughter, Kauri is lamenting the decision of her father to leave her birth place because it is painful for her leave her house, friends, fields, plants, trees and childhood memories. The following lines from the epic are a poignant description of a little girl's emotional bond with her motherland besides giving a vivid visual picture of the flora and fauna:

इंदे मिठे फल मैं खाडे

ले इंदे ने झूटे

किश ते आप- मूहारे ते किश

बापू लाये बूटे (*Jitto* 116)

Those juicy fruits I savoured

And I grew swaying these swings

some ever greens I know are perennial

And father has planted and nurtured others.

(My trans.)

ए ऊचा सिंबल दा बूटा

ओ दा पछवार

कियाँ करिये छोरण बापू

इन्दा गुजजा प्यार (*Jitto* 116)

Oh! this red silk cotton tree

in my backyard so imposing and tall

Listen father! How can I ever be free

From its warmth, care and call. (My trans.)

Such poignant spectacle, diction and melody is further augmented with the feature *anagnorisis*, which Aristotle defines as "a change from ignorance to knowledge, producing love or hate between the persons destined by the poet for good or bad fortune". One of the most remarkable traits of Mahākāvya *Jitto* is hero's sudden awareness of a

real situation and a critical discovery which occurs twice - once in the beginning when he becomes aware of the futility of living in Aghaar, where his aunt and cousins spare no chance to harm him and stooped to the level of intimidating and attacking his daughter. Finally, Jitmal is transformed from an ignorant to an enlightened hero towards the end when he refuses to accept cruelty and unjust demand of the feudal lord, Mehta Bir Singh. *Anagnorisis* as the hero's sudden awareness of a real situation and his insight into a relationship with an often antagonistic character is explicit in the below quoted lines when Jitmal emerges as a peasant hero by subverting Mehta Bir Singh's arbitrary commands, avarice and injustice. Therefore, he jumps over the heap of grain and thrusts a dagger in his chest. His last words are poignantly drawn by the poet which also resonate the critical discovery of the protagonist

मेरा लहू ते सूहा मेहतया

तेरी रत्त ए चिट्टी I

दिना तुकी रत रलाइ

खायान कनक नी रुखी II (*Jitto* 208)

My blood is red, oh Mehta!

whereas yours is white

here I colour them these grains

Don't you eat them white. (My trans.)

Ostensibly, Jitmal subverted the power dynamics in fifteenth century feudal society through his sacrifice. As an aftermath of the sacrifice of such a noble soul, the wrongdoers were punished by nature through disease and cataclysmic devastation. Jitmal's daughter Kauri could not bear her separation from father and committed sati with her father. Jitmal's friend Rullo and his wife, Jiyuni, who had been with them throughout their struggle erected a temple in their memory and their sacrifice apotheosized them Jitmal and kauri. Shiv Nirmohi, an eminent writer and historian, in his paper entitled, "Duggar Da Shaheed Devta: Bawa Jitto" calls Jitto, "A Shaheed Devta." According to him, deification of a martyr has been a tradition in *duggar* and a person sacrificing his life for his rights is deified and is called a martyr deity in *duggar*.

On the literary canvas of dogri literature, there exists rich corpus of the Jitto legend – be it epic, play, short story or children book. The English translation of the dogri play, *Bawa Jitto* by Vandana Sharma was published in the year 2011 wherein the Foreword to *Bawa Jitto*, G K Das has made pertinent observation about the sacrifice of Jitto when he writes, "There is something intriguingly atavistic about Bawa's action for which there can be no simple explanation in terms of behavioral psychology or cultural anthropology". Das further states that Jitto's action has the

power to regenerate the society similar to the “practices of animal/human sacrifice for regeneration of life and crop” and also like “James Frazers’ accounts of older community life and of fertility gods who were consigned to death for new and better yield.” (viii)

Dogri mahākāvya *Jitto* parallels the universal appeal of other two great epics – Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and Valmiki’s *Ramayana* in treating eternal problem of good and evil in the life on earth. It is noteworthy that the three epics from different times and contexts, “assert eternal providence, and justify the ways of God to men resonated in the words of Milton. Further, what makes *Jitto* timeless is its contemporary appeal aptly averred by Sharma, Sood when they write that, “An epitome of Dogra identity, *Jitto* still continues to rule the hearts of lakhs of people thronging every year at his Samadhi at Jhiri in Jammu”. (5)

GLOSSARY

Duggar: A word for the land of Dogras. Dogras are inhabitants of Jammu province, southern regions of Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and some parts of Pakistan like Sialkot. Before Partition 22 ranges of Dogras existed, which were ruled by Dogra rulers. Duggar has its own culture, folklore and language. The political divisions after Partition brought immense demarcations in the land of dogras. Jammu is now predominantly called the land of Dogras.

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